

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MADRID 09203 032155Z

71
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 9203

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SP
SUBJECT: PARTIDO POPULAR PRESENTS ITSELF FORMALLY

REF: MADRID 8596

1. THE CENTRIST PARTIDO POPULAR, WITH EX-MINISTERS JOSE MARIA DE AREILZA AND PIO CABANILLAS THE BEST-KNOWN OF ITS SEVERAL LEADERS, PRESENTED ITSELF FORMALLY DECEMBER 1 WITH THE PUBLIC READING OF ITS MANIFESTO, FOLLOWED BY A PRESS CONFERENCE AND A RECEPTION HIGHLIGHTED BY INFORMAL SPEECHES BY THE TWO LEADERS.

2. BOTH THE MANIFESTO AND THE PRESS CONFERENCE MADE CLEAR THE PARTY'S DETERMINATION TO STEER A MIDDLE, RESOLUTELY DEMOCRATIC COURSE. EMPHASIZING AVOIDANCE OF EXTREMES AND
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PAGE 02 MADRID 09203 032155Z

ANTAGONISMS AND PLUMPING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRATIC CO-

EXISTENCE, POLITICAL STABILITY, AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. IT TOOK A CAUTIOUSLY POSITIVE LINE REGARDING THE OPPOSITION MOVES TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE GOVT (IT HAS BEEN AN OBSERVER AT MEETINGS BEING HELD TO FORM A NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE), AND EXCLUDED ONLY THE FAR RIGHT AND MARXISTS AS POTENTIAL PARTNERS. THE PP ALSO WENT TO SOME PAINS TO POINT OUT THE DISTINCTION AND DISTANCE BETWEEN IT AND THE RIGHT-OF-CENTER ALIANZA POPULAR, AND STRESSED THAT ITS MOST NATURAL ALLIES WERE OTHER CENTRIST TENDENCIES, NAMELY THE LIBERALS, CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS. ALSO NOTE-WORTHY WAS THE INSISTENCE - DESPITE THE PRESENCE OF AREILZA AND CABANILLAS - THAT THE PP HAS NO "STARS" AND NO PREDOMINANT LEADERS.

3. WITH THE CENTER STILL LARGELY UNFORMED THE PP'S CLEAR AND OBVIOUS STRATEGY IS TO CARVE OUT AS BROAD A DEFINITION OF THAT AREA AS POSSIBLE, REJECTING THE EXTREMES AND DECLARING THAT ALL OTHERS ARE BOTH COMPATIBLE AND WELCOME, EITHER AS ELECTORAL ALLIES OR AS PARLIAMENTARY PARTNERS IN THE FUTURE CORTES. THE STRATEGY HAS ITS DRAWBACKS: THE IDEOLOGICAL AND PROGRAMMATIC MESSAGE IS SO CAREFULLY IN-OFFENSIVE AS TO BE BLAND, UNARGUABLE BUT UNEXCITING, WHILE THE DOWN-PLAYING OF LEADERS, AIMED AT FACILITATING FUTURE MERGERS, COULD INTERFERE WITH THE PARTY'S PUBLIC PROJECTION, AT LEAST UNTIL THE WRAPS WERE TAKEN OFF. (THE LATTER PART OF THE STRATEGY IS ALSO EXTREMELY MODEST: BOTH AREILZA AND CABANILLAS ARE HIGHLY RESPECTED, OF COURSE, AND SEVERAL OBSERVERS HAVE ALREADY COMMENTED ON WHAT ONE NEWSPAPER CALLED THE HIGH GRAY-MATTER-PER-SQUARE-METER QUOTIENT OF THE PARTY, WHICH ALSO COUNTS AMONG ITS FOUNDERS SUCH WEE-RE-GARDED POLITICO-INTELLECTUALS AS RICARDO DE LA CIERVA, FORMER FEDISA LEADER JOSE LUIS ALVAREZ, AND JUAN ANTONIO ORTEGA DIAZ AMBRONA, A PROMINENT TACITO FIGURE WITH CLOSE TIES TO FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA.)

4. THIS EFFORT TO MAXIMIZE FUTURE OPTIONS IS ALSO HAMPERED BY THE FACT THAT WITH ELECTIONS NOW EXPECTED AS EARLY AS MARCH, TIME IS SHORT, A POINT WHICH CABANILLAS ACKNOWLEDGED WHEN HE VOLUNTEERED TO EMBOFF THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE DONE BETTER TO COME OUT SOONER. THE STRATEGY IS NEVERTHELESS HARD CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 MADRID 09203 032155Z

TO ARGUE WITH, AND THERE IS A MEASURE OF AGREEMENT ABOUT THE NEED FOR A BROAD CENTRIST COALITION WHICH MIGHT BRING ABOUT A NATIONAL ELECTORAL ALLIANCE. SO FAR, AT LEAST, HOWEVER, THE PRINCIPAL CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC FIGURES--GIL ROBLES, RUIZ-GIMENEZ, AND ALVAREZ DE MIRANDA--HAVE STUCK TO THEIR INSISTENCE ON THE INTRINSIC MEANING AND ELECTORAL APPEAL OF THE CD LABEL, AN INSISTENCE DOUBTLESS ACCOMPANIED BY CONCERNS OVER WHO WOULD LEAD A BROADER

ALLIANCE; AND THE LIBERALS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, ADMITTEDLY
LESSER FRY, ARE ALSO HOLDING BACK, PARTLY OUT OF AFFECTION
FOR THEIR OWN LABEL AND PARTLY, ONE SUSPECTS, OUT OF
CONCERN OVER THEIR OWN LIKELY ROLES AS JUNIOR
PARTNERS IN A LARGER ALLIANCE. EVEN AS THE FORMAL LAUNCHING
OF THE PARIDO POPULAR HAS DRAWN POSITIVE RESPONSES IN
POLITICAL CIRCLES HERE, IT HAS ALSO DRAWN EXPRESSIONS
OF DOUBT THAT IT CAN REALLY BRING THE CENTER TOGETHER.
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